



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE INVITES COMMENTS
ON INTENTIONAL INTRODUCTIONS POLICY REVIEW

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced release of a proposed report to Congress on the intentional introduction of non-native species to U.S. rivers, lakes, and other aquatic ecosystems. Entitled "Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations of the Intentional Introductions Policy Review," the report examines approaches to reducing the risk of adverse consequences associated with the release of fish and other aquatic organisms into waters where they would not normally be found. Public comment on the report is invited.

Nonindigenous, or non-native, aquatic species are those species found in ecosystems beyond their historic natural distribution. Developing a balanced approach for dealing with nonindigenous aquatic species is difficult because of the issue's complexity.

On one hand, many local economies rely on funds generated by sport fisheries for intentionally stocked non-native fish.

On the other hand, some introduced species have been identified as factors in the endangerment and extinction of native fish species. For example, some cutthroat trout have become extinct as a result of interbreeding with introduced non-native trout.

"Resolving the extremely complicated problems caused by the presence on non-native aquatic species in our waters is of utmost urgency," said Gary Edwards, the Service's Assistant Director for Fisheries and Co-Chair of the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force that conducted the policy review. The introduction of nonindigenous species, whether intentional or non-intentional, pose

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a significant threat to many forms of aquatic life. Examples include the zebra mussel and the ruffe which are quickly spreading through U.S. lakes and rivers and competing with native fish for food.

Fisheries management in most states involves the use of non-native species to bolster existing sport fisheries. For example, the introduction of salmon into the Great Lakes has created an important fishery for bordering states. Nonindigenous species are also used extensively in the aquarium industry, public and private aquaculture, and research. Hundreds of species are imported annually by the aquarium industry for resale or domestic production.

Threats to native species may come from the intentional introduction of non-native fishes for sport fishing, accidental escapes of fish from both public and private culture facilities, and releases of fish by aquarium hobbyists.

The proposed report recommends that decisions be based on ecosystem considerations that transcend state or national boundaries. It also concludes that recommendations should generally apply only to new introductions--thus taking into account ongoing activities of economic importance dependent upon previously introduced species.

The report further identifies the need to expand educational programs as a key to the success of risk reduction. It calls for close cooperation and sharing of information among Federal agencies, the states, industry, and private organizations to increase support of education and extension programs, to improve on the implementation of existing laws, and to support research aimed at better understanding the risks involved with intentional introductions.

The document was prepared by the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force, an interagency group established by Congress to carry out the requirements of the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990.

The deadline for the comment period on the Report to Congress is October 25, 1993. All written comments should be directed to Sharon Gross, ANS Task Force Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1849 C Street, N.W., (820 ARLSQ), Washington, DC 20240. Announcement of the report's availability was published in the August 27, 1993, Federal Register.